JOHN H. TWACHTMAN

AMERICAN ARTISTS SERIES

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

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JOHN H. TWACHTMAN

BY

ALLEN TUCKER

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Publication of the books entitled MARY CASSATT, GLENN O. COLEMAN *and* ALLEN TUCKER *has been postponed. These volumes will appear in* 1932.

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FOREWORD

THIS *book is one of a series devoted to the work of various American artists and is published by the Whitney Museum of American Art, founded by Gertrude V. Whitney. The purpose of these books, like that of the Museum which sponsors them, is to promote a wider knowledge and appreciation of the best in American art.*

For assistance in preparing this volume for publication, we wish gratefully to acknowledge our indebtedness to the Macbeth Gallery for information regarding paintings used for illustration, to The Arts *magazine for the loan of its files of photographs, and to the museums and private collectors whose paintings, reproduced in this book, add so notably to the value of the illustrations.*

JULIANA R. FORCE, *Director*
Whitney Museum of American Art

Photograph by Peter A. Juley & Son

JOHN H. TWACHTMAN

JOHN H. TWACHTMAN

BY

ALLEN TUCKER

YEARS ago the Art Students' League had its home over a livery stable in East 23rd Street, and the Preparatory Class, morning and afternoon, was taught by John H. Twachtman.

At that time beginners had to go through the lower classes to gain admission to the Life Class. This system had the advantage of weeding out the lazy and the incompetent, but it put a heavy load on the master who taught that class.

It was in this Preparatory Class that I met Twachtman. It was when I showed him my drawing of a block hand that I first saw that straight, thin, nervous, shy figure, the fair bearded face, and the seeing blue eyes. It was my first meeting with the combination of a gentleman and an artist.

Years after I found that the drawings that I made in his class were the best drawings that I made during all the years that I was in the League. Later I worked in the summer class that Twachtman and Weir had at Cos Cob, and was under the influence of these two men whose high virtue in their attitude toward art so affected their generation. J. Alden Weir was a friend of Twachtman all through his later life. It was a deep friendship, a noble affection, a fine thing in human relations.

It was not this or that particular criticism that counted so much as it was the quality of the men themselves, and the nobility of their relation to art. Until then I had thought that a picture had to be like another picture, like some sort of a standard picture that one worked to emulate, and it was Twachtman who opened the door for me, and made me understand that it was what *I* did that mattered, that it was what *I* did that counted for me, that no one could do it for me, that I didn't have to be

like or unlike anyone else, that it was my job, that the world was mine and that there was nothing between me and the wonder of it all but that rectangle of white canvas.

When men proclaim the precious idea of freedom and independent thinking they have reached the high point of any teaching.

Ernest Lawson was the leading member of the class, and a help to the rest of us, for from the first he got hold of things, and painted canvases made of colour and filled with light and air.

I don't remember many things that Twachtman said. It is unfortunate that we recall so little of the conversation of those who have gone forward.

His criticism in the League was very careful, very accurate. "It is too long from here to here," or the rare encouragement of his "Very well." In the summer class, "There is more art killed in an art school than anywhere else." "The business man is always certain, the artist is never sure," and speaking of the ordinary attitude toward drawing, "To put an object over there (in the third dimension) that is another kind of drawing."

I was told that once when the art editor of the Century Magazine said to him, "Twachtman you seem to me to lead an ideal life, living in the country with your family about you, and just painting all the time," Twachtman replied, "You don't know what it is to spend your life trying to do something that you can't." Which remark, I think, shows a pretty complete realization of the artist's problem.

But it wasn't what he said that so much counted, it was the impact of that fine spirit, in being in contact with that pure attitude toward painting, in touching that acute active mind, in feeling his refinement and his understanding—that was important.

It was only years afterward that I realized how much help I had had from him in my endeavour to climb the topless mountain of art.

Twachtman was preeminently a landscape painter, expressing his

ideas through landscape, having that intuitive connection with the growing world that a man must have if he is to be more than a mere recorder of natural fact.

No one could have held the hand of Nature with more childlike confidence than Twachtman, and she on her part, gave to him of her most delicate affection.

The influence of the Impressionists affected his work greatly, releasing him, and widening his vision. It was a real influence, and not in any way an imitation, for while he would not have been what he was without that influence, his work was unlike either the general tendency of the movement in the methods of using split colour or applying paint, and also unlike the work of any member of the group in the way of seeing the world. He took the idea of totality, of unity, which was the great contribution of the Impressionists, and holding that idea, saw the world and stated that seeing entirely for himself.

The pictures that he painted before this happening were grey, accurate, fine in their relations, comprehensive in their grasp. Compared to the later work rather tight and definite, but always large, true landscapes, ably constructed and designed with the fine vision that was his birthright.

He expressed his comprehension of the world, his ideas of man and nature through a unified design. In the picture of his house at Greenwich, now in the Phillips Collection, how well he conveys the running and the playing together of the shadows across the breast of the verdant hillside.

In the large picture that tends to dominate the room in which it hangs in the Boston Museum, how solid is the ground under the caressing snow, how secure, how vital the fir trees standing in the frozen world, and all given to you with restrained, compact design, without a superfluous dot.

The schooner in the Freer Gallery in Washington, so easily painted, and so solid in its form, so complete in its visual comprehension.

In any of his snows, how well is understood and conveyed the miracle that happens when the air, the sky, the earth are filled with moving whiteness, and all these pictures shot through and through with the piercing poetry that was John Twachtman.

In his pictures we are moved, not by the mere representation, but by what the painter thinks and says about the world. It is a statement subtle and strong, for real strength is not noisy, it is very delicate and tender. In these pictures is no statement of obvious facts conscientiously arranged, the statement is of the whole, with the parts subordinated to that unity. These pictures are never obvious, never vociferous, and without any of the sentimentality so dear to the undeveloped mind.

The form is firm, but never insisted on, never pulled out of its life in the world, the bodies exist in space, and in their visual relations to each other, they exist in that active space with which the pictures are filled, that space which is surely one of the necessities of landscape painting.

Small natural fact did not interest him, it was the visual fact expressing the subtle things of nature, that held his attention. The scented air moving about growing flowers, the lines of falling water, the air filled with the spirals of falling snow. These things were understood and expressed by him at the same time that he painted the flowers, the ground and waving trees.

The world was looked on with the innocence of the truly gifted. It was his own personal vision, individual and original, and when such a vision occurs it is hard that it should occur in a civilization that cannot comprehend it, and that it is judged by the common man, ignorantly judging matters of quality while really unable to know anything, except of matters of quantity.

Here was a creative, poetic mind, quite apart from the acquisitive people among whom it found itself, and it is small wonder that there was no large appreciation of the paintings. Weir told me that Twachtman's pictures had been rejected by the National Academy the last year

of his life. Even the great advertiser Death, failed to make the public take notice, for the pictures sold at auction to settle his estate brought but a few dollars apiece. His pictures sell now for good prices, and his reputation is secure among the few, but never can a man of so delicate a mind be understood of the many. Some day the many will say that they appreciate him, but this will only be taking at second hand, the opinion of the few. After all in human endeavour, it is the opinion of the few that has made all the difference.

It is reasonable to suppose that if his pictures had been bought, and if he had not had to work so hard at the teaching, which must have been a drain on his energy and his time, that he would have done work even finer than he did, and that if he had not been so driven, he might have lived into an old age of achievement. One must always mourn when a talent is cut off before it has had the full measure of the years. So many of the producers have done their best work when they have been ripened by long experience, when they have grown to greater understanding of art, of life and death, and of the destiny of man.

In spite of the difficulties and the comparative shortness of his life Twachtman's accomplishment marks him as one of the foremost Americans of his day.

Above the limbo of forgotten politicians and unremembered magnates his name will remain and his work continue to show that in this country the poetic imagination still existed and that works of the spirit were still accomplished.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

John Henry Twachtman was born August 4, 1853, at Cincinnati, Ohio. His father, Frederic Christian Twachtman, had come to escape political oppression, from Erichhagen in Hanover, Germany, where the Twachtmans were small farmers of importance. After settling in Cincinnati Frederic Twachtman met and married Sophia Droege, also a native of Hanover. John Twachtman is said to have been like his mother, who was a thrifty woman of great intelligence. His father, who worked in a factory where decorated window shades were made, was the first to show him the use of paints, in putting on window shades the fruit, flowers and landscape designs, popular at that time. Soon John Twachtman was working regularly on these shades, bringing his wages to his mother, who put the money aside to be used by him later in European study. At night he was studying art at the Mechanics Institute, which he left to become a pupil of Duveneck at the Cincinnati School of Design. Duveneck, also a Hanoverian and family friend, took more than the usual teacher's interest in his pupil, who was only five years his junior.

It was with Duveneck that he set out for Munich in 1876. After first visiting his relatives in Hanover, Twachtman became a pupil of Ludwig Loefftz in Munich. He remained there two years, later going on to Venice where a third year was spent painting in company with Duveneck and Chase. In 1878 he returned to America, painting in Cincinnati and New York, where he showed two of his Italian pictures at the first exhibition of the American Society of Artists. In 1879 he was elected a member of this Society and exhibited five canvases. The winter of 1880 he was again in Europe, this time at Florence, where there was a colony of American painters, headed by Duveneck. Not long after his return to America in 1881 Twachtman married Martha Scudder, daughter of a well-known physician. They went to Europe on their wedding trip, visiting London and Dordrecht. At Dordrecht Twachtman received an encouraging criti-

cism from Anton Mauve and made sketches for a series of paintings and etchings of windmills. Munich and Venice were also visited before their return to New York. America seemed uninspiring and unsympathetic to them after a year abroad, so in 1883 they again sailed for Europe. This time Twachtman became a pupil of Boulanger and Lefebvre at the Academie Julien in Paris, and became interested in Impressionism, then creating much discussion. Summer sketching trips were made to Honfleur and Arque la Battaille, near Dieppe, but the Twachtmans were in Venice again for the winter of 1884. Before returning to America in 1885 Twachtman had sent ahead most of his canvases. Unfortunately the ship carrying them went down and with it the greater part of two years' work.

Art proved unremunerative in America and Twachtman had to search for some other means of livelihood. His father-in-law suggested that he combine landscape painting and minding cows on some property belonging to him, but Twachtman, after starting this, secured a well-paid position in Chicago, painting the sky and bursting bombs on the Cyclorama of the Battle of Gettysburg, on which Arthur B. Davies is also said to have been engaged. After completing this work Twachtman came East and settled at Branchville, Conn., from which he frequently went to Bridgeport, the scene of many of his water-front etchings. In 1888 he was awarded the Webb Prize at the exhibition of the Society of American Artists, and in 1889 conducted a summer class at Newport. In the autumn of the same year he acquired the farm near Greenwich which was his home for the rest of his life, and there he found the subject matter of many of his best known pictures. At this same time he was offered the instructorship of an antique class at the Art Students' League where he taught continuously until his death. During a visit to Buffalo a series of paintings of Niagara were made; and it was an admirer of these who commissioned him to do a set of Yellowstone Park. In 1893 he was awarded a medal at the Chicago Columbian Exposition and in 1894 won the Temple Gold Medal at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. In 1898

he founded an exhibiting society known as "The Ten American Painters," the original members of which were Benson, De Camp, Dewing, Hassam, Metcalf, Reid, Simmons, Tarbell, Twachtman and Weir. The Silver Medal for painting was awarded to him at the Pan American Exposition, Buffalo, 1901.

Several summers were spent painting at Gloucester, Mass., and it was here that Twachtman, when only 49 years old, died after a brief illness, August 8, 1902.

EDMUND ARCHER

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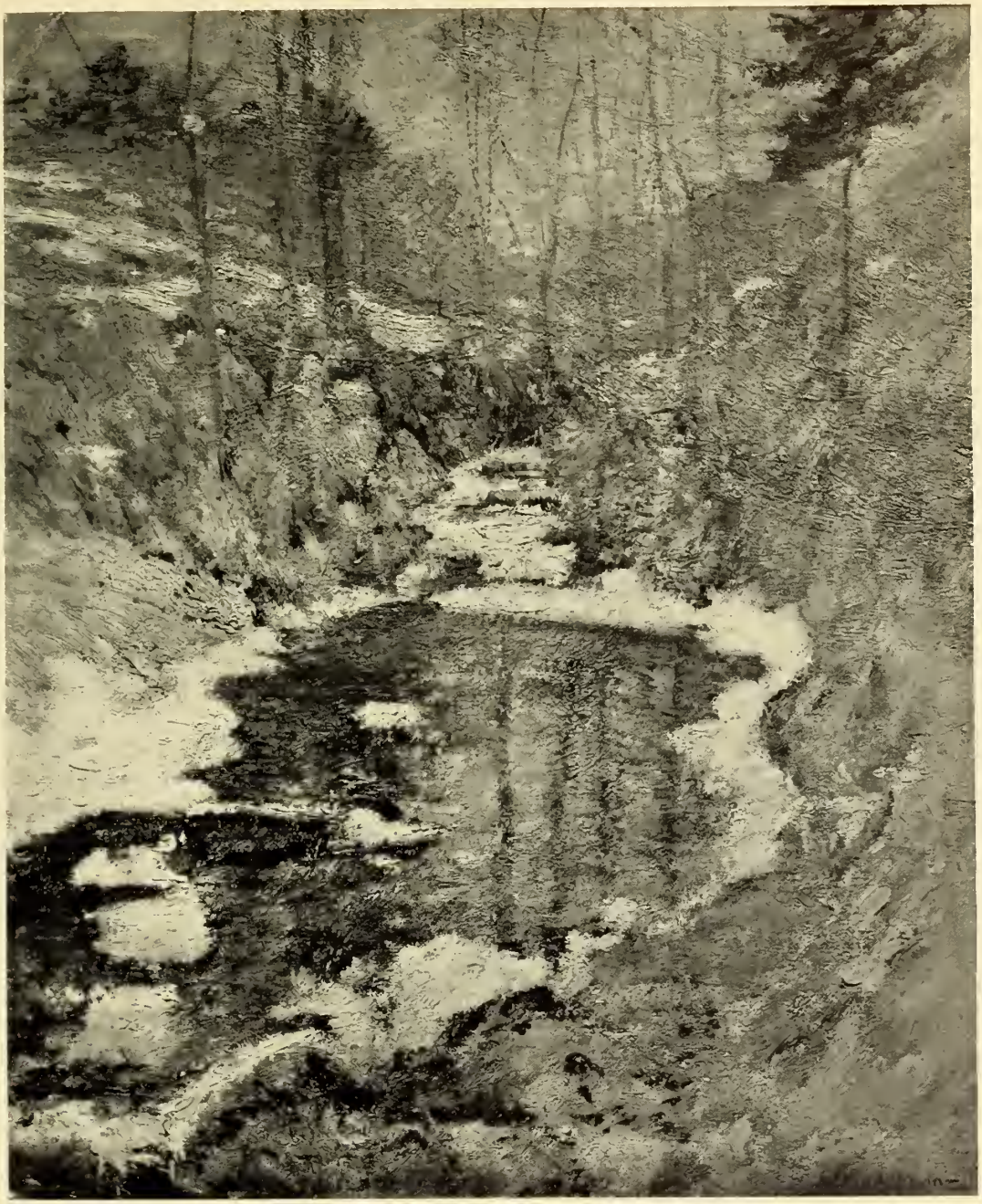
ILLUSTRATIONS

THE HEMLOCK POOL, *about* 1902

H. 30 inches W. 25 inches

Collection of The Addison Gallery of American Art
Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass.



Falls, Yellowstone Park

H. 25 inches W. 16 inches

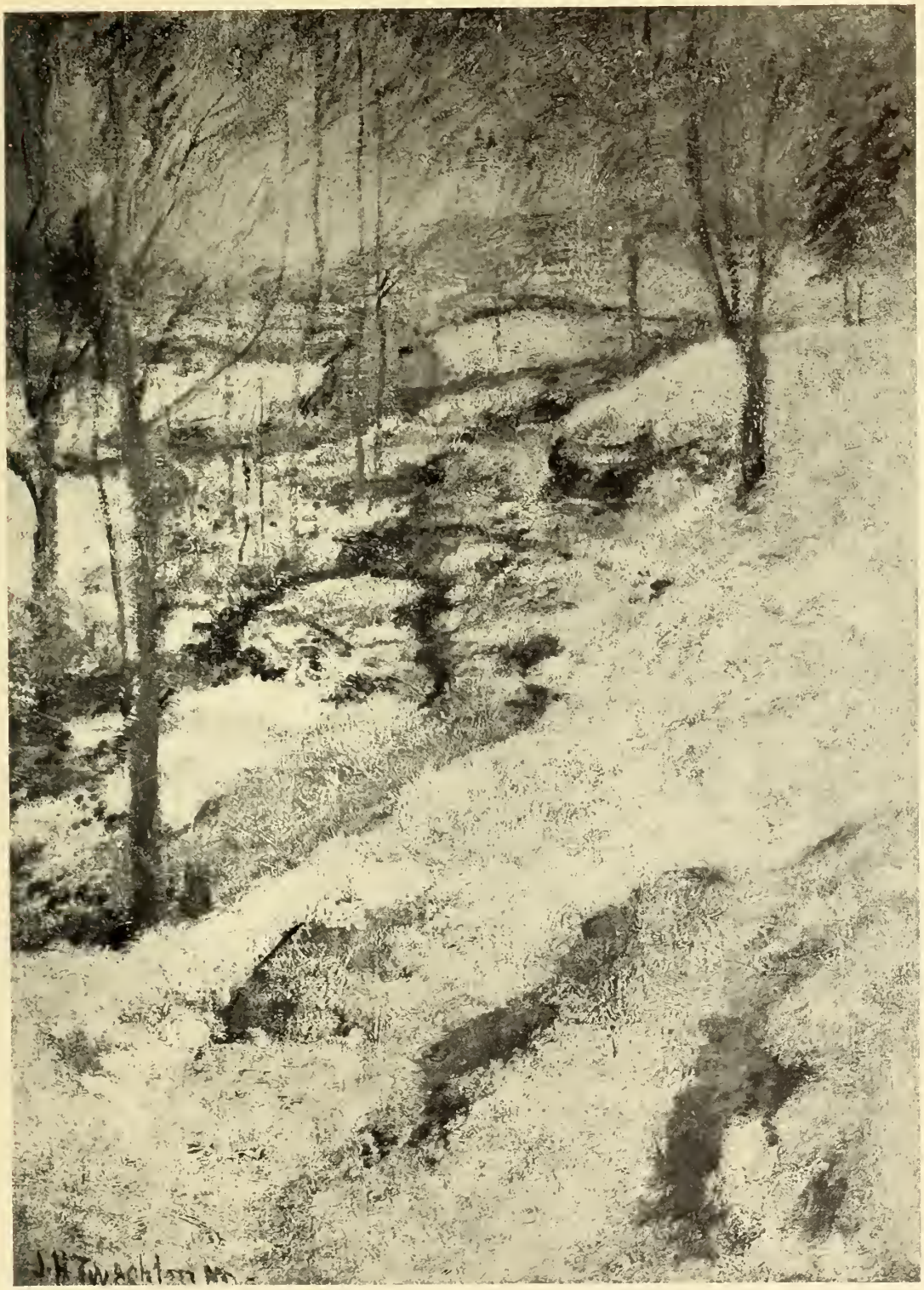
Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art

J.H. Twachtman

Frozen Brook, *about* 1900

H. 30 inches W. 22 inches

Collection of Mr. Albert E. McVitty, Bryn Mawr, Pa.


J. H. Twachtman

THE CASCADE, *about* 1900

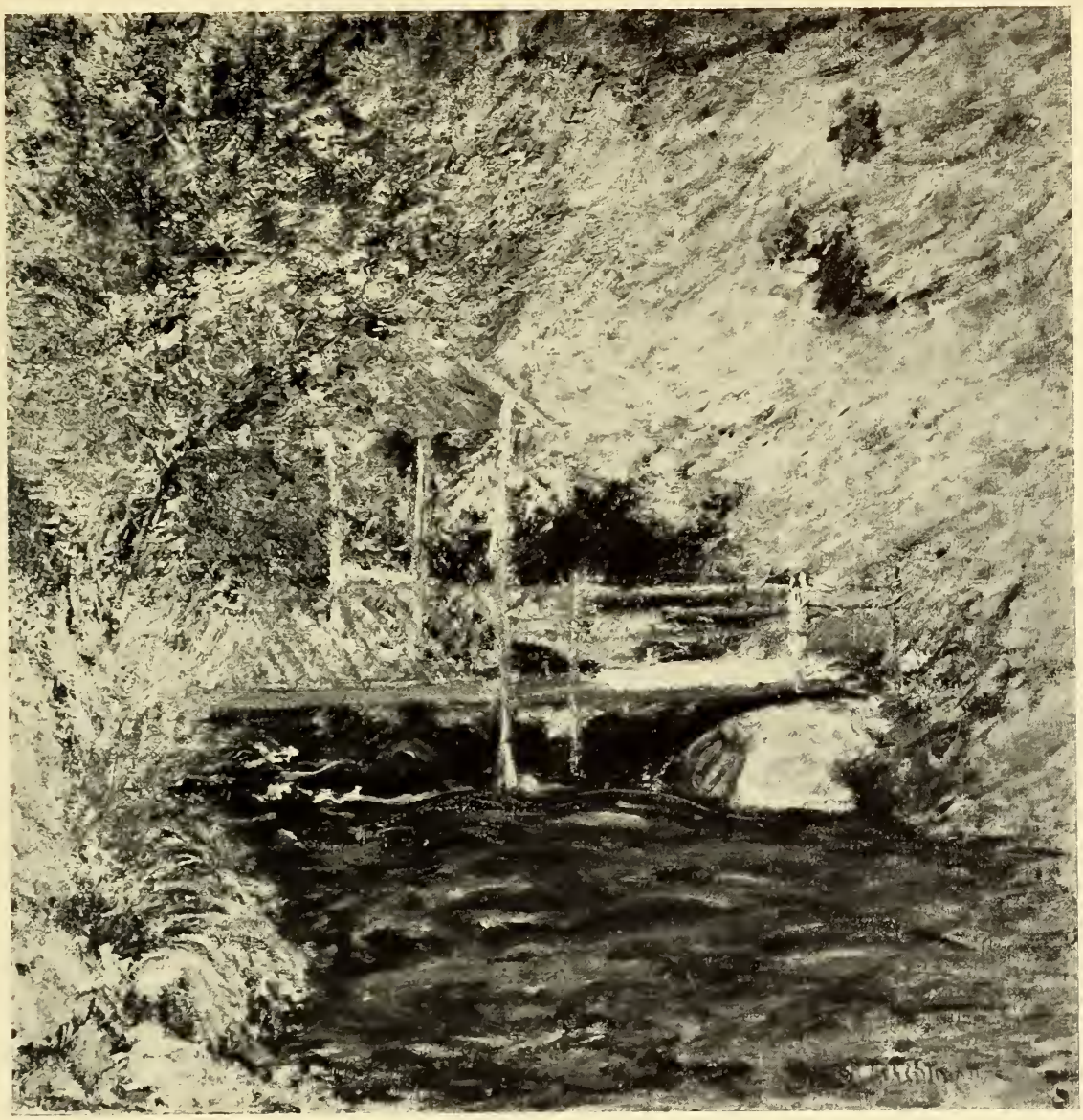
H. 30 inches W. 30 inches

Collection of Mr. Horatio S. Rubens, New York

The Little Bridge

H. 25 inches W. 25 inches

Collection of Macbeth Gallery, New York



NIAGARA

H. 30 inches W. 30 inches

Collection of Mr. J. K. Newman, New York

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The White Bridge

H. 30¼ inches W. 30¼ inches

Collection of Minneapolis Institute of Arts

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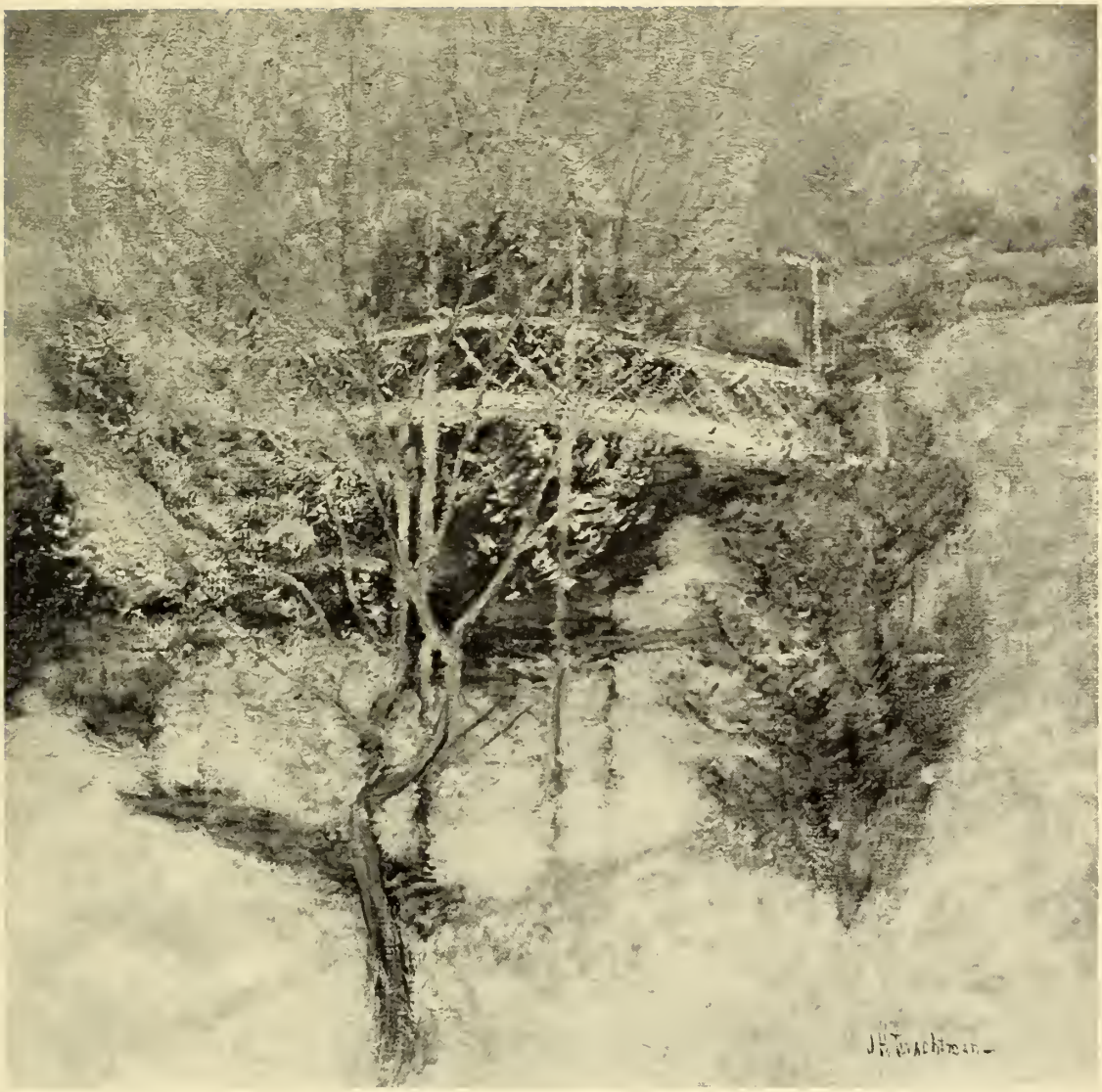


Drying Sails

H. 26 inches W. 19 inches

Collection of Freer Gallery of Art
Washington, D. C.

Wild Cherry Tree, *about* 1890

H. 30 inches W. 30 inches

Collection of The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy
Albright Art Gallery

FIGURE IN SUNLIGHT

(Portrait of Mrs. Twachtman)

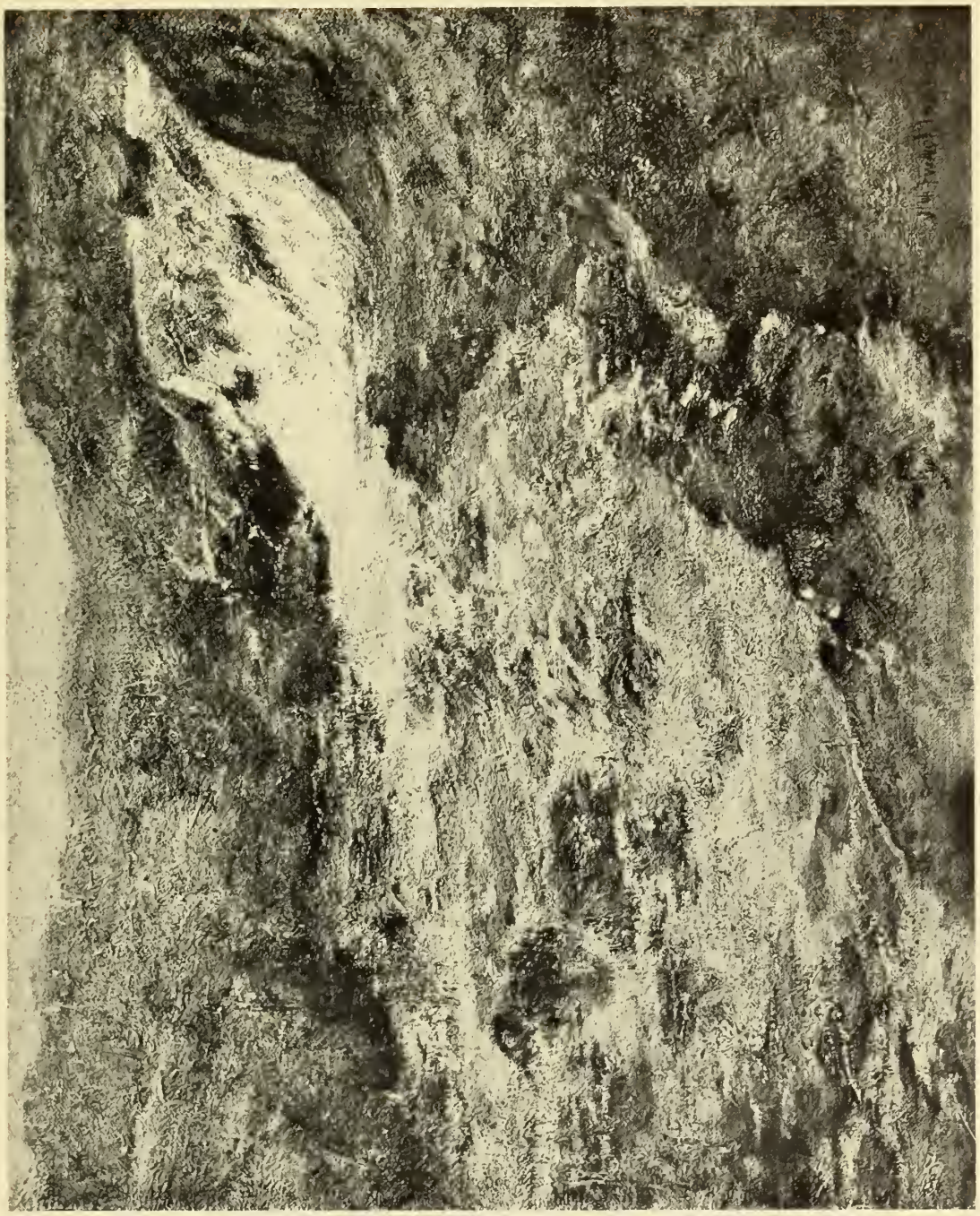
H. 26 inches W. 21 inches

Collection of Mr. John Gellatly, New York

THE TORRENT, *about* 1900

H. 25 inches W. 30 inches

Collection of National Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institute
Washington, D. C.



SUMMER, *about* 1900

H. 30 inches W. 53 inches

Collection of Phillips Memorial Gallery
Washington, D. C.

FEBRUARY

H. 36⅛ inches W. 48⅛ inches

Collection of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

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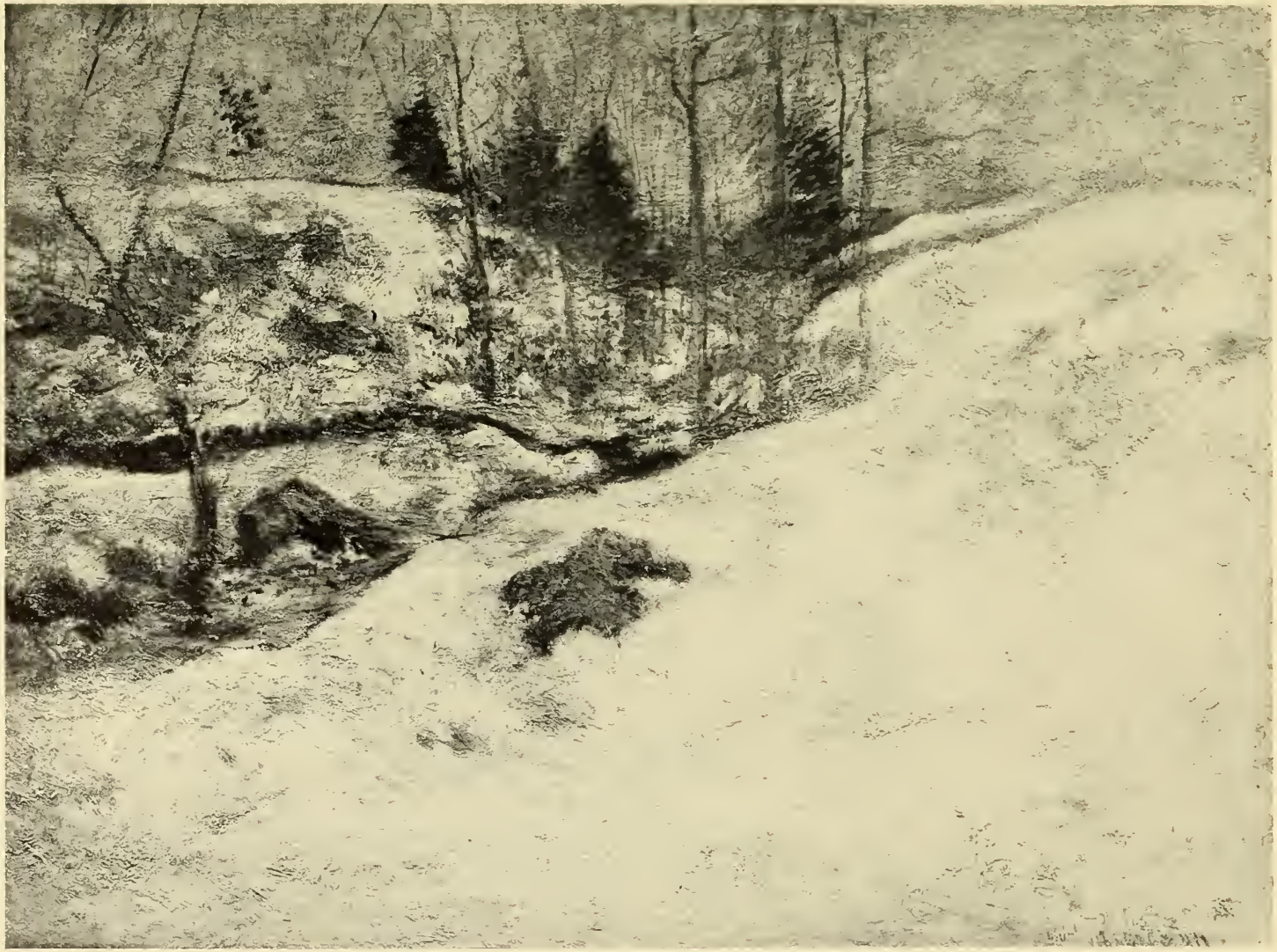

Falls in January, *about* 1895

H. 25 inches W. 30 inches

Collection of Mr. Robert C. Vose, Boston

J. H. Twachtman

Fishing Boats at Gloucester, *about* 1880

H. 25 inches W. 30 inches

National Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institute
Washington, D.C.
William T. Evans Collection

Along the River, Winter, *about* 1890

H. 15 inches W. 22 inches

Collection of Mr. J. J. Haverty, Atlanta, Ga.

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J.H. Twachman

Oyster Boats, 1879

H. 16 inches W. 24 inches

Collection of Mr. Gilbert S. McClintock
Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

J H Twachtman
N.Y. 79

LANDSCAPE, 1878

H. 12½ inches W. 20½ inches

Collection of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

VENICE

LANDSCAPE

H. 35 inches W. 46 inches

Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art

WATER COLOR

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur S. Dayton
Charleston, W. Va.

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